

VZCZCXRO7663
OO RUEHGI RUEHMA RUEHROV
DE RUEHKH #0049 0151239
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 151239Z JAN 09 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2686
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE
RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA

UNCLAS KHARTOUM 000049

DEPT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON, AF/SPG, DRL
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [SOCI](#) [AU](#) [UNSC](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: TURABI ARRESTED AFTER CALLING BASHIR "CULPABLE" FOR DARFUR

REF: 08 KHARTOUM 1523

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Dr. Hassan Abdalla al-Turabi, a founding father of the current Sudanese regime but now the leader of the opposition Peoples' Congress Party (PCP) and bitter opponent to the regime, was arrested at his home on the evening of January 14, following remarks calling on Sudanese President Omar El-Bashir to assume responsibility for death and destruction in Darfur and leave office.

Officers with the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) arrested Turabi and a PCP colleague late the evening of January 14. According to Turabi's son, both the family and the PCP intend to remain defiant through his indefinite detention. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) A founding member of the National Islamic Front (NIF), predecessor of the current National Congress Party (NCP) regime, Turabi told reporters on January 11 that Bashir is ultimately responsible for Darfur. "Politically we think he is culpable - he should assume responsibility for whatever is happening in Darfur - displacement, burning all the villages, rapes, I mean systematic rapes, continuously, I mean on a wide scale and the killing." Turabi's comments follow his October 2008 public condemnation of the NCP's much touted Sudan People's Initiative. At the time, he said of the International Criminal Court's (ICC) pending arrest warrant for Bashir that "Nothing can protect the president and the NCP from the ICC, not even the Sudan People's Initiative." (Reftel)

¶3. (SBU) Turabi's son Siddiq al-Turabi told poloff on January 15 that NISS officers summoned Turabi at 11 p.m., after he had gone to bed. Arrested along with Turabi was the PCP's secretary of foreign relations Dr. Bashir Adam Rahma. During the arrest the family received no indication of how long NISS intends to hold him. "We have a feeling now that they don't know what to do with him. What they do depends on circumstances inside the regime," he said, adding, "He is now in his 77th year, and he is not in perfect condition, so we are concerned for his health." Turabi said his family intends to issue a statement requesting his immediate release, and will appeal to international organizations and embassies in Khartoum to apply pressure as well, "because it is in the best interests of the government to release him." Following that, he said, the PCP will plan its party-wide response in the coming days.

¶4. (SBU) When queried as to why his father would adopt such inflammatory (in the local context) rhetoric at such a sensitive time, Turabi took the arrest as proof that the statement resonated powerfully within the regime. "He understood the need to make an impact. He said it because he is very proud to make the first statement to move things along. He has been doing this since the sixties." Addressing the rumors swirling in Sudan that the PCP is directly engaging with Khalil Ibrahim's Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), Turabi was less forthcoming. "It is the PCP's intention to talk to all parties, and it is appropriate to talk to

the Darfur rebels." Additionally, he indicated that Turabi may have intended to travel to London to meet with JEM, as Rahma did recently: "If we have the chance and the freedom, we will negotiate with all parties in the interests of peace."

15. (SBU) Comment: As demonstrated by his periodic arrests, Turabi's influence on the regime is significant - many of his former protgs are now senior leaders in the NCP regime and they both scorn and fear their former mentor. Additionally, it is widely assumed in Khartoum that Turabi's popular support among Islamists and students would render him untouchable, so while the regime can arrest him again, they would not dare to harm him or permanently imprison him. It is worth noting that there is a significant difference between Turabi's public and private comments; while in private he sometimes counsels the US toward constructive engagement with Bashir, Turabi showed no similar reserve this week in publicly calling Sudan's president a war criminal. He has always been scathing about the moral and intellectual qualities of his former pupils. This raises Turabi's profile among opposition parties and forces the NCP regime to deal with him. Turabi certainly knew that the regime would arrest him (the ICC issue is the regime's Achilles heel at this point) and probably hopes to gain some attention in what is a very personal blood feud with a regime he created, which then turned against him a decade ago.

FERNANDEZ